

Antenatal exercises

Information for women

This leaflet can be made available in other formats including large print, CD and Braille and in languages other than English, upon request.

This leaflet tells you about exercises to help you:

- stay healthy during your pregnancy
- prepare for the birth of your baby
- aid your recovery after the birth of your baby.

Mild to moderate exercise is good for you and your baby. However, it is best to do exercises you are used to. Walking, swimming or attending aqua natal classes are good forms of exercise during pregnancy. As your pregnancy progresses you should slow down the pace.

When exercising you should:

- drink plenty of water
- not overdo it
- stop if you feel tired or unwell
- avoid contact sports, for example, hockey, football or judo.

Exercise classes for pregnant women are available; ask your midwife for more information.

What exercises should I do?

Abdominal (tummy) exercises

Your abdominal muscles help to support your back. They stretch with your growing baby and become weaker. To keep these muscles strong you need to use them correctly.

To exercise these muscles:

- place your hand flat under your bump and take a deep breath in through your nose. As you breathe out pull your tummy in towards your spine, then relax.

Repeat 5 - 10 times, 3 times a day.

Once you are able to do this comfortably, repeat this exercise but this time keep your tummy muscles pulled in for up to 10 seconds while you breathe in and out.

Repeat 5 - 10 times, 3 times a day.

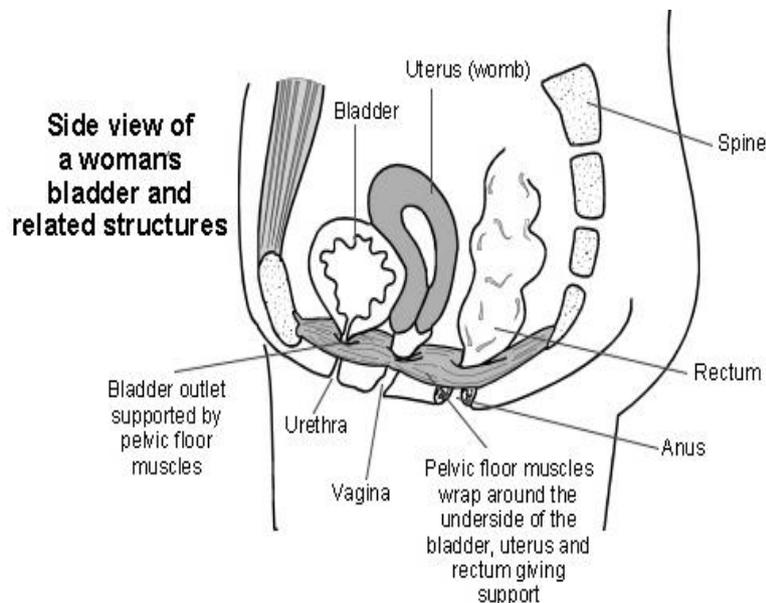
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Pelvic floor exercises

The pelvic floor is made up of layers of muscles, stretching like a hammock from your pubic bone to the bottom of your backbone (see diagram below).

These muscles help to hold your bladder and bowel in position, also the uterus (womb) in women. They stretch to allow your baby to be born. They prevent leakage from your bladder and bowel, only relaxing when your bladder or bowel is emptying.

During pregnancy pressure on your pelvic floor increases with the weight of your baby. This may cause your pelvic floor to weaken and you may leak urine when you exert yourself, especially after the baby is born. Doing your pelvic floor exercises before and after delivery can help to keep these muscles strong and flexible.



Side view of woman's pelvic organs and pelvic floor muscles

Why should I do pelvic floor exercises?

All women need to do pelvic floor exercises throughout their lives. Pelvic floor muscles may become weak:

- during and after childbirth
- through lack of exercises
- by straining to open your bowels
- by being overweight
- having a chronic cough.

Pelvic floor exercises can help strengthen your muscles so they can give your organs support again. This will improve your bladder and bowel control, and should help to reduce or stop any leakage.

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How to do pelvic floor exercises

You should:

- sit comfortably with your knees slightly apart.
- imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind from your bowel by squeezing and lifting the muscles around your anus (back passage). You should be able to feel the muscle move and the skin around your anus tightening and being pulled up.
- next imagine you are sitting on the toilet trying to stop passing urine, you are "zipping up" inside. You should be using the same muscles you used before.
- join both of these exercises together to strengthen your pelvic floor. This is called pulling up your pelvic floor.

There are 2 ways of doing these exercises. You will need to do both.

Slow exercises

You should:

- slowly tighten and pull up your pelvic floor muscles and hold for 5 - 10 seconds, then relax for 5 seconds.
- repeat 8 times.

You may not be able to hold for 5 - 10 seconds at first but try your best and keep practising. After a 2 minute rest start your fast exercises.

Fast exercises

You should:

- quickly tighten and pull up your pelvic floor muscles then let them relax straight away.
- repeat this exercise 8 times.
- do these exercises at least 3 sets every day.

When you have learnt how to do pelvic floor exercises you can do them while sitting, for example, watching TV, standing, such as, washing up, waiting for a bus or lying down.

You should continue to do these exercises every day for the rest of your life. It is important you continue to enjoy life and not allow your bladder to control your life.

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Exercises to improve your circulation

During pregnancy the blood circulation in your legs often slows down causing swelling of your feet and ankles. Try to support your legs on a stool when you are sitting down and avoid sitting with your legs crossed.

You should:

- sit on a chair with your legs straight out in front of you
 - bend your ankle to stretch your feet up and down
 - move your feet around in circles.
- sit on the floor and push the backs of your knees into the floor; the muscles on the front of your thighs should tighten.

Do each exercise 10 times, at least once a day.

Exercises to help your posture

During pregnancy, due to the weight of your baby, you will tend to stand with a hollow back, sticking your tummy out. This puts a strain on your spine which can cause aches and pains in your back and pelvis.

A hormone called relaxin is present in your body during pregnancy. This hormone helps to make the joints of your pelvis more supple (flexible) ready for the birth of your baby. Relaxin affects every joint, for example, knees, ankles and feet, and may cause strains and sprains.

To help prevent backache

When walking and standing you should:

- walk and stand 'tall.'
- try to keep your shoulders back and tummy in at all time.

Do



Don't



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When sitting you should:

- not slouch; make sure your back is against the back of the chair. It may help if you place a cushion in the small of your back.

Do



Don't



When bending you should:

- keep your back straight and bend your knees.
- hold objects close to your body as you stand up, if you need to lift something.

You should not lift heavy or large objects when pregnant.

Do



Don't



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When getting out of bed you should:

- roll onto your side and then push yourself up with your arms.



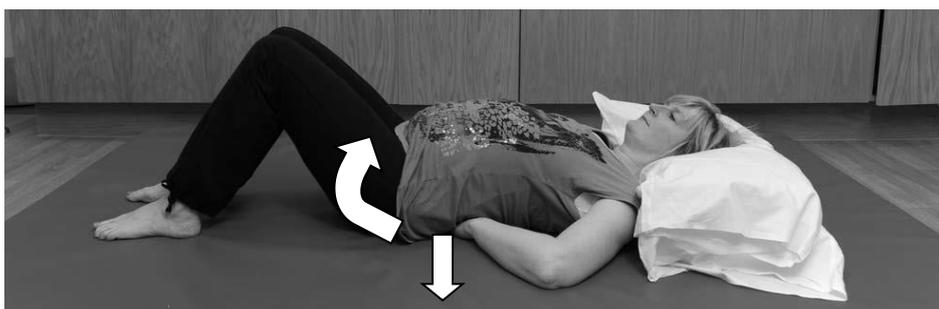
Pelvic tilting exercise

This exercise will help to improve your posture and relieve backache.

You should:

- sit, stand or lie on your back, with knees bent
 - pull your tummy in, tilt your bottom upwards slightly and press the small of your back against the chair, wall or floor
 - hold for a count of 3
 - relax
 - repeat 5 times. This should be done at least once a day.

You **should not** lie on your back in the last 3 months of pregnancy without several pillows under your head as this may make you feel faint.



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Pelvic tilting when sitting



Sport

You can continue any non-contact sport you are used to so long as you are comfortable.

Do

- walk, swim, cycle, dance
- practice yoga and stretching exercises
- rest or slow down when needed.

Don't

- push yourself to maintain pre-pregnancy standards
- exercise when you are tired
- do very strong tummy exercises, for example, sit ups
- jump excessively, for example, trampolining.

Ask your midwife or doctor about taking part in sport if you have had any problems during your pregnancy.

Contact numbers

If you need further advice, or have any worries, please contact:

University Hospital of North Tees

Community Midwives

Monday - Friday, 8.30am - 9.30am

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Footsteps

Ochill Terrace
Billingham
Telephone: 01642 528920

Ragworth Children's Centre

St Johns Way
Stockton
Telephone: 01642 528061

Sunrise Children's Centre

Yarm Road
Stockton
Telephone: 01642 527218

High Fliers Children's Centre

Tedder Avenue
Thornaby
Telephone: 01642 527809

Non-urgent messages can be left on an answering machine and will be picked up throughout day.

If your call is urgent you should contact the hospital where you are due to have your baby.

Antenatal Day Assessment Unit

Telephone: 01642 624239
Monday - Friday, 8.30am - 8.00pm
Saturday and Sunday, 9.00am - 5.00pm

Outside these hours calls are transferred to the Delivery Suite.

Delivery Suite

Telephone: 01642 382718
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Antenatal / Postnatal Ward

Telephone: 01642 382722
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

University Hospital of Hartlepool

Antenatal Day Unit

Telephone: 01429 522879
Monday - Friday, 9.00am - 5.00pm

Outside these hours calls are transferred to the Birthing Centre.

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Community Midwives

Telephone: 01429 522279

7 days a week, 9.00am - 10.00am

Non-urgent messages can be left on answering machine.

East Durham

Based at Peterlee Community Hospital

Telephone: 0191 586 3474

Monday - Friday, 9.00am - 10.00am

Non-urgent messages can be left on answering machine.

Further information is available from:

NHS Choices

Telephone: 111 (when it is less urgent than 999)

Calls to this number are free from landlines and mobile phones
or via the website at www.nhs.uk

National Childbirth Trust

Alexandra House

Oldham Terrace

Acton

London

Telephone: 0300 330 0772

Monday – Friday, 9.00am - 8.00pm

website: www.nct.org.uk

Bladder and Bowel Foundation

SATRA Innovation Park

Rockingham Road

Kettering

Northants

Telephone: 0845 345 0165

Monday - Friday, 8.00am - 8.00pm

website: www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

Information used in the development of this leaflet:

Fit for pregnancy, 2008, Chartered Physiotherapists in Women's Health.

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This leaflet has been produced in partnership with patients and carers. All patient leaflets are regularly reviewed, and any suggestions you have as to how it may be improved are extremely valuable. Please write to the Quality Assurance Team, University Hospital of North Tees or email: patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk

Comments, Concerns, Compliments or Complaints

We are continually trying to improve the services we provide.

We want to know what we're doing well or if there's anything which we can improve, that's why the Patient Experience Team is here to help.

Our Patient Experience Team is here to try to resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. If you would like to contact or request a copy of our PET leaflet, please contact:

telephone: 01642 624719

Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 4.00 pm

Messages can be left on the answering machine and will be picked up throughout the day.

freephone: 0800 092 0084

Email: patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk

Out of hours if you wish to speak to a senior member of Trust staff, please contact the hospital switchboard who will bleep the appropriate person.

telephone: 01642 617617

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Patient Experience Team is available to discuss your concerns in person Monday – Friday, 1.30 pm – 4.30 pm. The office is based on the ground floor at the University Hospital of North Tees.

Data Protection and use of patient information

The Trust has developed a Data Protection Policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All of our staff respect this policy and confidentiality is adhered to at all times. If you require further information please contact the Information Governance Team.

telephone: 01642 833551 or email: information.governance@nth.nhs.uk

University Hospital of North Tees, Hardwick, Stockton-on-Tees. TS19 8PE

University Hospital of Hartlepool, Holdforth Road, Hartlepool. TS24 9AH

Telephone: 01642 617617

Fax: 01642 624089